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RUNNING THE HOUSE WITH THE CHILDREN IN MIND

A radio talk by Hildegarde Kneeland, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered through WRC and 38 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, November 12, 1930.

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If you have been tuning in for these talks each week lately, you have heard about planning the house with the children in mind, and about furnishing and equipping it so that the children can be comfortable and happy and feel they really belong in every room. And now I come along to talk to you about managing the home for the best interest of the young generation.

I wonder what sort of picture comes to your mind when you think of a well-managed home. To many men, I fear, the term has a very cold and forbidding sound, suggesting a household run with such perfect order and system that it is a major offense to have newspapers or cigarette ashes around, and high treason to come home late for dinner. Perhaps to you too the idea of good management is anything but inviting; it may make you think of that very particular neighbor of yours, who is, to be sure, a perfect housekeeper--but who also is a perfect example of what not to be in making the family comfortable and happy.

Now needless to say, it is not this type of good management which is recommended in the report of our Committee on the Management of Home Activities. The Committee recognizes, of course, the importance of a clean and orderly house in bringing up the children, of serving the right sort of meals and serving them on time, of having the housekeeping run smoothly so as to avoid friction and strain and emotional upsets. But it emphasizes even more the importance of adjusting the housekeeping to the needs of the family, of making the home a place to be used, lived in, enjoyed, a place where every member of the family, from father to the smallest child, finds comfort and good comradeship, and an opportunity to develop his interests and abilities.

The report especially stresses the importance of having the children share in the various activities of the home. Now let me say at once that the Committee recognizes the fact that we cannot return to those days when the children spent a great deal of time in helping with the work of the home. For the modern boy and girl the demands of school work, of their clubs, and their games, fill the day-time hours to overflowing, and in the evening there are lessons which must be gotten for the next day. But although it is useless to expect a large amount of time from children, the committee urges that every child have some jobs to do in the home, not so much for the sake of helping to get the work done, as for the value to the child himself. There is a very real educational value, though it is not easy to measure, that comes through the child's opportunity to help. He gets training in cooperation, and develops a sense of responsibility and a feeling of real importance in the home of which he is a part. At the same time, the tasks that he does help him develop skills,

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making him deft with his fingers, so that when he grows up, he is not one of those helpless persons who can do nothing useful about the house.

"But," you may be thinking, "it is all very well to talk about letting the children share in the work of the home. Getting them to do so is not as easy." Yet after all, isn't the child usually willing enough, and often anxious, if we go about it just right in getting him started? The most important thing is to begin with the little tots. Give the toddler a chance to wipe the teaspoons, to carry a dish or two to the china closet, to put away his own toys. To him it is wonderful to be helping mother, and at the same time it is valuable entertainment by which he learns, and develops steadiness in growing muscles. With such a start, by the time the child is ten or twelve, a well-grounded habit of being useful has been formed. Even so, it is important to offer enough variety in the tasks expected of children so they are not bored by them. Clara may find daily dish washing a chore, but if she has the choice sometimes of putting away the clean laundry or of planning the meals, her interest will continue. Likewise her big brother may resent having to bring in wood for the kitchen stove or caring for the furnace every day, but he may take real pride in washing the automobile or learning to grease it.

This sort of good management in the home, of course, may add to the mother's already heavy schedule for a time, rather than lighten it. But even so, it is well worth the effort, when we consider the value to the children themselves and to the home life of the family.